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COJO program weakened by ignorance of rock

Rock & Pop
by
Juan Rodriguez

By virtually ignoring the world of rock music, the July COJO arts and culture program made a travesty of the "spirit of youth" that the Olympic Games are supposedly all about.

Indeed with a lack of superstars, a chameleon-like publicity non-campaign, spurious "Canadian content" regulations and a glut of erratic local talent, Montreal was considerably less cosmopolitan a city for popular music in July than in most other months.

Thus, it was fitting that the most artistic secular music in town, that of Oscar Peterson, was presented by the Queen Elizabeth Hotel and not COJO.

This could have been a fine opportunity to show the world what kind of popular music melting pot the Montreal scene embodies, but instead the bureaucrats who organized the grand shebang displayed an ignorance of rock, which is after all the most popular arts and culture form in the world.

The bureaucrats love big numbers, so they organized 1,000 musical presentations in which quality was obviously sacrificed. The Evêché Club of the Hotel Nelson — this town's most consistent showcase for top local rock-pop talent — was corralled for a month with two different acts every night. Most of these performers had been seen either in better circumstances by local fans or were near unknowns.

It was no accident that on many nights the Eveche attracted a mere 40 people. COJO should have reserved the Eveche for longer runs by bigger local music stars capable of at least reaching out to the stream of tourists and locals alike.

But COJO had no wish to reach out. Its choice of Gino Vanelli — a specialized pop artist who has yet to really prove himself — as popular music "ambassador" of the Games was ridiculous, and was rendered a farce when Vanelli cancelled out because he was not equipped to mount a show after two of his band members left him.

COJO reportedly could not afford the big price tags of the legitimate Canadian international pop-rock acts — Joni Mitchell, the Band, Anne Murray, Neil Young, and the rest — but what was The Band doing 50 miles south of Montreal, at the Champlain Valley Music Festival in Essex Junction, Vt, during the Olympics? Surely Montreal could have outbid Vermont for their services.

Not only did COJO restrict itself to Canadian acts — the ones they could spare change on — but they made it impossible for other impresarios to bring in international talent. The Rolling Stones, via local impresario Donald K. Donald, were ready willing and able to perform here during the Olympics (in spite of the cancellation of their American tour), but Olympic organizers could not bear the thought of being "upstaged" and nixed the project.

The only two "Canadian" international acts to perform, the Maynard Ferguson band and Blood Sweat and Tears, were as far from being Canadian as they were from rock. Only trumpeter Ferguson and singer David Clayton-Thomas are citizens of this country, while both groups tend towards jazz with a big sound — rock only if let in by the back door.

Evidently COJO did not consider Jesse Winchester and Michel Pagliaro — pop-rock talents with international attractions — to be worthy of the Olympic spirit, even though they are most outgoing Montreal pop singers. As far as rock groups were concerned, local or otherwise, there was no place for them in COJO's scheme of things.

The closest they came was the ill-fated Cogne Fou show at Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier; this combining of Quebecois rock musicians represented the only original music written exclusively for the Games, but it was lost in a publicity campaign that couched itself in arrogant lack of interest in where these musicians were coming from.

As a result, the show was almost cancelled because of poor ticket sales — astonishing since a group with members of well-known rock groups Beau Dommage, Contraction, and others would normally attract strong local support — and the musicians were berated by some for "getting rich" on COJO funds even though they netted only $125 each a week for three weeks' rehearsals. No wonder the show had a disjointed feel to it, far below the capabilities of these gifted local musicians.

The bureaucrats who organized COJO's music obviously had little knowledge of the worldwide popularity of rock. Sound, rhythm, the big beat and volume make up an international language but COJO treated rock as if it still lacked legitimacy. If it had bothered to check with music industry people, it would've found out that rock is big business in which empty seats are not part of the game.

But COJO refused to embrace the real world — preferring cloistered bureaucratic beliefs — which is why the rock-less music series to celebrate youthful prowess was a sham.

Piggery's 'Dracula' — monks, Bach and atmosphere

Ethereal actress down-to-earth

NEW YORK — (UPI) — Meg Wynn Owen in the flesh is strangely ethereal, astonishingly beautiful, and oddly remote, as though she'd stepped out of another century.

It takes an effort of will to realize that this is the same actress who plays the tragic Hazel Bellamy in the *Upstairs, Downstairs* British TV serial now being re-turn on PBS, and was the epitome of high-comedy flapperdom as Gwendolyn in Tom Stoppard's hit *Travesties* on Broadway last season.

It would be much easier to imagine her as a reincarnation of Isolde, or an idealized Burne-Jones beauty.

She's shy and reticent, tall and slim, with pale red hair and a slightly breathless manner of speech.

She's also a first-class actress, constantly in demand, who has gone through the rough and tumble of repertory in the British "provinces." She approaches a role like a general planning a campaign, is finicky about her directors, likes to experiment with all the media, but always returns to the stage.

"I was booked for *Upstairs, Downstairs* for two years," she said in a recent interview. "They were very kind and asked me to stay on. But it was just treading water." So they had to kill off Hazel at the end of the second year, and she went into *Travesties*.

She now is taking things easy waiting for the next right role to come her way — "I always have to have space between jobs" — dividing her time among here, Europe and California.

"Right now I'm really floating. I've been working full out for three years, which is heavy. I'm staying with a friend and I'm exploring New York at times when normal people can explore, not just early in the morning or late at night."

She and her husband, Australian abstract painter Bill Wright, regard London as home. They bought a run-down four-storey house there five years ago and renovated it mostly themselves.

Meg Wynn Owen was born in Mumbles, Wales, and "stumbled into the theater" at 15. She began in the traditional way, first as assistant stage manager in a provincial theatre, then in small roles in theatres all over the country. Between stage jobs she read novels on the radio and acted on Welsh and later national television.

"I did a lot of 19th century heroines," she smiled. "It's the face."

Her favorite director is Peter Wood, for whom she did *Travesties*.

"He's brilliant, one of the greatest I've ever worked with. He's dangerous. He makes you walk a tightrope without a balance. I'd worked with Peter before — on TV and one movie. And he wanted a tall redhead.

"I didn't read for the part. He sent me the script and after I read it I phoned him and said, 'Peter, you've made a mistake.' He said, 'Don't fuss,' and hung up. So I just decided to turn up for rehearsals. I became an entertainer."

Mahogany Rush ready for success

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
for The Gazette

Mahogany Rush, the Montreal rock trio led by that prodigious child of the novelty — guitarist Frank Marino, now all of 21 — recorded a live album during their concert last night at Place des Nations.

The show was a big one for the group, which has gone further in the international rock world than any other local outfit. An airplane flew by with a banner: Welcome Home Mahogany Rush. More important, the group's new manager, David Krebbs (of Aerosmith fame), was among the trio's large entourage taking in the show. It was Krebbs who, in his first move as their American manager, signed them to a new contract with Columbia (after they has put out three albums on another label), and the live album recorded last night could be a pivotal point in the band's career.

Marino and cohorts put forth an excitement on stage that has attracted a cult following, but has not translated itself on disc as yet.

Marino has a creative mystique that captures the imagination of his youthful fans. He has taken off from the Jimi Hendrix style of pyrotechnics and in the search to put across his own thing, he has developed a sense of humor in his delivery.

Last night, Marino reminded me of a very modern Bo Diddley, as he is not afraid to coin familiar cliches in a crazy plethora of sound, without too much regard for rules and regulations. Consequently, there is a sense of carney in his playing that is so often missing from today's guitar speed merchants.

Backed by solid chunky rhythms from bassist Paul Harwood and drummer Jimmy Ayoub, Marino was energetic and confident in his electric convolutions. The climax of the show was to be Marino's climb to roof of the stage to throw off his guitar (although deadline considerations prevented my witnessing this piece of showmanship).

The first half of the show — which featured several seemingly interminable delays — was performed by Derringer, the new group led by guitarist Rick Derringer, formerly with the McCoys and both Johnny and Edgar Winter. Derringer is an elfin performer who has a lot of spunk and a few brains to match, but this group is almost desperately speedy, with a series of fairly good rock riffs churned out at a dogged, soulless clip.

Russian art to tour here

OTTAWA — (CP) — Forty-two paintings from two Soviet museums will be exhibited in Winnipeg and Montreal, the secretary of state and external affairs departments announced yesterday.

They will be at the Winnipeg Art Gallery Aug. 13 to Sept. 26 and at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts Oct. 8 to Nov. 14.

Fangs for memories of a winning 'Dracula'

By JULIA MASKOULIS
of The Gazette

NORTH HATLEY — A Christian argument on the divinity of the Supreme Being, organ music by Bach, and dirty Latin chants by sex-starved monks set to music by Carl Orff?

It may not sound like *Dracula*, but it is in a gem of a production which opened last night as the third summer play of the Piggery Playhouse here.

To say that *Dracula* is only a study of atmosphere, ritual, and horror handled with humor is an understatement.

Toronto director Timothy Bond is no newcomer to this play, adapted for the stage by Hamilton Deane and John L. Balderston from Bram Stoker's classic novel. He has directed it twice before in 1974 for Theatre New Brunswick and Stoker Productions in Toronto. Two of the original cast — David Brown (Dracula) and Laurence Aubrey (Harker) — are in the Piggery production.

Bond obviously has a great love for horror stories — not masochistic horror but the friendly kind that goes with a bonfire in the woods and toasted marshmallows. This appreciation has helped him harness the energy of *Dracula* into a well-paced, believable production without descending into pathos or silly slapstick.

Under a less capable hand, the play, similar in plot to the movie, could have turned out a tragedy — for the audience.

In the end it almost becomes one, but for the dramatically right reasons.

Brown — who directed the musical revue *Oh Coward* last summer at the Piggery — is a masterpiece of mock horror in his Dracula role.

Faintly resembling a human being behind the Danish-blue-cheese complexion and the slicked-back American Grafitti hairdo — plastered with verathane instead of Brylcreem — Dracula speaks heavy Transylvanian, with Hungarian overtones.

As his is obviously the most dramatic presence, he tends to dominate the stage and sends nervous giggles of delight through the audience whenever he appears. He is well backed by the cast — two of whom are students — and they have done an excellent job, considering the play has been in rehearsal only two weeks.

The play is a solidly worked-out piece of dramatic tension, which — unlike some theater so far this summer — resolves itself in the end. In this sense it is emotionally gratifying to watch.

Excellent use is made of the stage and props supplemented by the superb lighting design of Rod Hayward.

A smoke generator combined with religious music is a definite plus to the atmosphere.

The set design by Lisa Hughes works well and is furnished in Victorian decor with ominous smoke-grey walls and glass door through which a bat can fly in and out. Minor criticisms could certainly be made — the bat, for instance, looked like a dishrag stuck on a piece of wire — but the production is definitely worth the trip out of town.

Janet Adcock, Peter Bierman, Robert Buck and Brian Booley, also in the cast, deserve compliments as well. Bierman's madman was especially delightful.

Dracula plays until Aug. 21 with two shows on Saturdays. Children will also love it.

Banff festival music salutes U.S.

BANFF, Alta. — (CP) — The 1976 Banff Festival opened this week with an exuberant 24-hour program of ballet in classical and modern style by students of the Banff School of Fine Arts.

This year, the musical side of the school is saluting the U.S. bicentennial.

Tuesday's ballet program, to be repeated three times this week, ended with *Rodeo*, choreographed by American dancer Agnes de Mille to composer Aaron Copland's music, with borrowed sets and costumes from the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, which has had the work in its repertoire for many years.

The dancers were given top-notch backing with a professional orchestra conducted by Victor Feldbrill, resident coductor of the Toronto Symphony, and coaching by such prominent ballet authorities as Earl Kraul, Anna Markard, Frank Bourman, Eva von Gencsy and Vernon Lusby.

The audience, which filled the 1,000-seat Eric Harvie Theatre, applauded generously.

In a sweltering, humid auditorium, the dancers kept smiling and dancing despite heaving chests, bodies bathed in sweat and hair hanging in wet masses by the end of the performance.

Two new works were introduced — *Albescence*, by Kraul to music by Malcolm Arnold, with George Brough playing the organ part in Arnold's concerto, and *Echo and Narcissus*, choreographed by Larry Hayden. The latter is a sensuous love duet danced by Gioconda Barbuto of Toronto and Jean-Hughes Rochette of Winnipeg.

In *Albescence*, Thomas Pearce of Vancouver danced with Natasha Hosein of Trinidad and Lisa Meinholtz of Missoula, Mont., in a provocative trio behind a shimmering veil.

Copeland is to come here to conduct the festival's student orchestra next week and de Mille is to attend a performance of *Rodeo*.

While the ballet program marked the formal opening of the festival, 26 leading students of brass instruments performed a brief concert in the theatre foyer earlier, including works by composers ranging from Johann Sebastian Bach to Henry Mancini.

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LOGAN'S RUN, Parisien 4
SILENT MOVIE, Place du Canada
CHINO, Place Victoria
ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN, Little Place Ville Marie
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GONE WITH THE WIND, York
THE SHOOTIST, BIG BUS Dollard 2 Drive-In. Gates open at 7:30 p.m.
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